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ABSTRACT

This study involved students majoring in business/economics and foreign language in an international business program. The students were participants in a semester-long international experience where students were integrated into a host university to learn about management, economics, and marketing from professors abroad, and in an internship in a multinational corporation in a developing country. An interpretive approach was used in analyzing what students do and how they do it, with participants interpreting their world as they experienced it, in conversations with the adjunct faculty responsible for program implementation. Interviews were also conducted with the internship supervisors, host families, and professors at the university abroad. Robert Hanvey's five dimensions for an attainable global perspective were used as the conceptual framework for analyzing student reactions. The five dimensions include perspective consciousness; "State of the Planet" awareness; cross-cultural awareness; knowledge of global dynamics; and awareness of the problems of choice confronting individuals, nations, and the human species concerning the global system. The paper concludes that salient meanings surfaced in the reactions of participants to the unexpected, and the experience integrated participants' formal instruction with the subject matter of life experience. (Contains 20 references.) (JDD)

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Prepared by Viann Pederson de Castañeda for the *Annual Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions,* Eastern Michigan State University, Ypsilanti, MI, April 14-16, 1994.

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The Secret Lives of Undergraduate International Business Students: An Analysis of Cross-Cultural Experience in Multinational Corporations

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Currently less than five percent of American college students study abroad (Council on International Educational Exchange, 1988, p. 16) yet "thirty-three percent of U.S. corporate profits are generated by international trade....[F]our out of every five new jobs are generated as a direct result of foreign trade", and "the 23 largest U.S. banks derive almost half their total earnings overseas" (p. 10). The Council on International Educational Exchange reports that "the U.S. is the only major world power with no language requirement for entering its foreign service", that "forty percent of American foreign-area scholars cannot conduct research in the language of their specialty", and that "the U.S. continues to be one of the only nations in the world where a student can graduate from college without ever having studied a foreign language" (p. 11). In their report on study abroad by American undergraduates (1988), this Advisory Council called for fundamental changes in American higher education which specifically address international education for an interdependent world. The report contains four general recommendations:

1. "Every American college and university is urged to put in operation an organized and evaluated provision for study abroad by the year 1995". The number of college students who study abroad should be increased to at least 10% by 1995 and approach a realistic goal of 20-25 % by 2008. (p.16).

2. Special efforts should be made to identify potential leadership ability from all social groups and to incorporate study abroad into a wide range of academic programs (p. 12) to include "mathematics, science, medicine, business and industry, technology, international affairs, economics and education--so that our students can learn in these

fields from teachers abroad, from observation of these professions in other countries and form a broader perspective on American ideas and practices in these fields" (p. 15).

3. "Study abroad in developing countries and those outside the traditional Anglo-European settings should be a matter of high priority, with special attention to creating exchange programs in the Western Pacific Rim, as well as in the rest of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe" (p 12).

4. "Responsibility for implementing increased internationalization should be vested at the highest institutional level" (p.12) "Institutions should encourage--or even require--all departments and schools within the university to include statements in their catalog on how study abroad can be incorporated into the course of study" (p. 20). The Council suggests that "longer periods abroad are more effective in educating Americans about other cultures" (p. 21) citing semester programs as effective and full-year programs as optimum. The Council maintains that students should be "integrated into host universities"....and that programs should "emphasize personal immersion"....and provide "homestays, internships, or directed field studies" in order to maximize learning.

These mandates from the Advisory Council for International Educational Exchange are neither unique nor are they innovative. Education critics repeatedly have cited our nation's inability to compete internationally inferring that the United States is a "nation at risk" (1983). The Southern Governor's Advisory Council on International Education concluded that economic competitiveness is tied to international education (1986). Based on the premise that our nation cannot compete nor be secure in a world where we can neither communicate nor comprehend, the National Security Education Act was signed into law on December 4, 1991, to provide funding for new programs in foreign language and international education in higher education. Nearly a century ago, John Dewey warned us that "[t]here [was] a standing danger that the material of formal instruction [would] merely be the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-

experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 8). We find ourselves in the midst of a focus on reform in international education largely initiated by policy makers outside of education who perceive the present standing dangers to be our nation's inability to compete in a global economy and our lack of global knowledge to confront international crises with domestic implications that directly impact national security. This reform calls for a "Copernican" revolution (García, 1991), a transition, from a myopic, geocentric national view of the world, that will allow the nation to compete beyond our national boundaries, diminish the limitations of monolingualism, and allow the nation to regain the technological superiority in business and industry that is in danger of becoming a cherished memory. Critics have challenged higher education to relinquish an equally parochial view of the world and promote the interaction of people from more than one culture across all disciplines. We are faced with a contemporary mandate to deliberately design, implement, and evaluate programs that are singularly focused on national survival in a global society. We are asked to discover "actual numbers and categories of students, where students go, what they do and how they do it", and to what extent "their programs meet the expectations of their institutions" (C.I.E.E., 1988, p. 21).

Nature of the Study

Research concerning study abroad programs has two things in common: 1) it follows the quantitative research paradigm using methodology which relies on statistical analysis, and 2) its focus is on characteristics of the program's academic goals, vocational skills, and personal goals accomplished during international programs. Statistical evidence gleaned from surveys will tell us about the categories and numbers of students and where these students go (Koester, 1985). Several studies have attempted to analyze the extent to which their programs meet the expectations of their institutions (Carsello and Greiser, 1976; Nash, 1976; Kauffman, 1983; Sell, 1983; Koester, 1985; Carlson and Widaman, 1986; Hansel and Grove, 1986; Juhasz and Walker, 1988; Krejci and Hovde, 1991) in

terms of academic goals, vocational skills, and personal goals using traditional psychometric assessment instruments. These investigations provide statistically convincing yet conflictive evidence based almost exclusively on summative program evaluation concerning whether or not international programs meet innumerable institutional and national expectations established as *a priori* outcomes for international education.

The Advisory Council for International Educational Exchange (1988; p. 21) specifically asks researchers concerned with international programs in higher education to consider "what students do and how they do it". These questions not only require researchers to document and interpret the formative processes contained in active experiential learning in culturally diverse locations but also to encourage dialogue between the researcher and the subjects. These questions challenge the researcher to incorporate the reactions and perspectives found in student voices, to recognize idiographic and multiple causation found in unpredicted learning, and to view unanticipated contingencies as a potential illumination of salient meanings found in reactions to the unexpected (paraphrased from Bolster, 1983). Frederick Erickson defines interpretive research as a collaborative process between subjects and an "unusually observant participant who deliberates inside the scene of action" (Erickson, 1986; p. 157). Erickson contends that interpretive research methodologies are appropriate when more knowledge is required about "the specific structure of occurrence[s] rather than their general character and overall distribution"....Interpretive research is indicated when "we need to know more about "the meaning-perspectives of the particular actors in particular events". In international programs we are unable to pinpoint "the location of naturally occurring points of contrast that can be observed as natural experiments" either "logistically or ethically to meet experimental conditions of consistency of intervention and of control over other influences in the setting"....Interpretive methodologies allow "the identification of specific causal

linkages that were not identified by experimental methods, and the development of new theories about causes and other influences on the patterns that are identified in survey data or experiments" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121).

The "scene of the action" in this study is an international business program where personal immersion is required through a semester-long homestay and where integration into a host university obligates students to learn about management, economics and marketing from professors abroad. An internship in a multinational corporation located in a developing country promotes the professional observation component where students theoretically form a broader perspective on American business ideals and practices. More than 30% of the students who graduate from this mid-western undergraduate institution complete an international experience as part of the formal curriculum in 22 academic programs. Foreign language is required. It is evident that this institution has acknowledged a responsibility for implementing increased internationalization as an institutional priority.

The subjects in this study are student participants majoring in business or economics and foreign language. Each embodies a unique structure of life occurrences as they participate in this international program. Each participant represents an idiographic and personal perspective about the meaning of their experience in the program. It is impossible to try to establish consistent experimental conditions for subjects when the setting is a foreign culture rather than a research laboratory. Specific causal linkages concerning the relationship between what subjects do and how they do it as they interact within a foreign culture on a daily basis are difficult to document in summative survey data or with a controlled experimental model.

Description of the Methodology

The unusually observant participant who deliberates inside the scene of the action of this program is the coordinator of the program. My deliberations began in 1982 as adjunct faculty responsible for the logistical aspects of program implementation and development abroad. More recently, through a combination of field notes and on-site interviews with participants, host families, internship supervisors, and professors abroad along with document analysis found in performance reports from managers and student self-evaluations and reflective journals, I have systematically documented what students do and how they do it over an 18 month period of time. The research "focuses on events occurring in and around the actual program in context" (House, 1978, p.). In this interpretive approach, each case in unique and emphasizes perception and knowing as a transactional process between the subjects and the observant participant researcher. "Perceiving is always done by each person from [their] own unique position, experiences, and needs....each person creates [their] own psychological environment by attributing aspects of [their] experience to the environment....consequently, the world as it is experienced is the product of perception, not the cause of it" (House, 1978, p.).

In order to capture perceptions which I cannot predict due to their idiographic nature, I ask participants to respond to ten prompt words (important to me, sad, torn between, strong conviction, anxious, success, angry, frustrated, lost something, and moved or touched) written on ten index cards. I ask them to write the first thing that comes to mind on each card and then to rank them in order of personal significance. This procedure removes the possibility of an *a priori* research agenda and encourages participant voices to interpret their world as they experience it. These conversations occur three times during the process of student experience abroad: the week before participants leave for international study, at mid-semester abroad, and within a week after their return to the college following the semester abroad. The conversations I have with student participants

form the basis for the interviews with the internship supervisors, host families, and professors at the university abroad. Journals and personal letters written by the participants to me as a requirement of the internship experience along with written evaluations from internship supervisors contribute yet another dimension of potential illumination as I consider what students do and how they do it.

One Rational for International Education

The planning document at this college asserts that "[a]s a liberal arts college of the church, we do not stand abstracted from, but in significant relation to, what is happening in our larger community and world. We are a place that works at fostering understanding of the world, visions of what can be, and an attitude of active participation in working out those visions as we seek to *influence the affairs of the world*" (Blueprint IV, 1991). The underlying theoretical rationale for international programs at this college is structured along Robert Hanvey's suggestions for the incorporation of an attainable global perspective into the curriculum (Hanvey, 1975). In his essay, Hanvey envisions the modes of thought, sensitivities, intellectual skills, and explanatory capacities that ultimately will equip students to face the challenges of an increasingly interdependent world. His thoughts are organized along five dimensions which describe a pedagogical process. Hanvey, reminiscent of Dewey, suggests that the "material of formal instruction" not be separated from the "subject matter of life-experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 8) when he asks practitioners "to admit the limited impact of formal schooling and the often profound impact of informal socialization" (Hanvey, 1975, p. 2). Hanvey's rationale also recognizes the dialectical relationship of learning "continuously reshaped by experience" (Hanvey, 1975, p. 2) a consideration found in the critical or emancipatory paradigm developed by a group of current curriculum writers known as "reconceptualists" (Schubert, 1986, p. 176). The central assumption of the critical or emancipatory paradigm is critical praxis, "an integration of theoretical critique of society and action or practice that seeks to improve

society and the individual through education" (Schubert, 1986, p. 318). Among the reconceptualists, Paolo Freire has produced "the most systematic statements on how to translate theory into educational practice" (Bowers, 1984, p. 368) so that we might "transcend the sociological analysis of schooling in order to engage the question of an alternative educational practice" (Bowers, 1984, pp. 365-366). The Advisory Council on International Educational Exchange asks us to equip students to face the challenges of an interdependent world. Their mandate requires that 25% of the undergraduate students in this country engage in alternative educational practice. The Council also calls for deliberate research and evaluation concerning what these students do when faced with life-experience abroad as the subject matter of instruction and asks for an analysis of how students cope with the dialectical confrontation of disparate cultural ideologies.

A Conceptual Framework for International Experience

Robert Hanvey's five dimensions for an attainable global perspective provide a conceptual framework for the consideration of salient meanings illuminated by student reactions to unexpected in foreign scenes of action. The first dimension, "perspective consciousness" recognizes that "most people in most societies do not sense the uniqueness of their own or their society's world view" (Hanvey, 1975, p. 4). Participants are perplexed when they begin to discover that their view of the world is not universally shared.

> *I had a hard time concentrating today....This is really a lot harder than I ever thought it would be. We are going without so many of the freedoms that I just took for granted at home.*

The second dimension, "State of the Planet" awareness, suggests that direct experience beyond local communities is infrequent and encourages awareness of "prevailing world conditions and developments" (Hanvey, 1975, p. 6). Pollution of the physical environment

is but one example that invariably becomes a significant issue for interns located in Mexico City.

> *I had a chance to go to an environmental meeting....Two days before that there had been pollution levels at 400....The top 150 polluting businesses had been called that day and they had to shut down production. The man sitting next to me said, "Frankly, we were really disgusted about having to shut our shift down because in that one shift we lost millions of dollars". I just couldn't believe that he was talking about money when we were talking about health.*

Students often cope with the dialectical confrontation found in international experiences by writing introspective journal entries that recall significantly different planetary conditions.

> *After spending two weeks sick and drained both physically and emotionally because of the contamination levels....I feel as though I am ready to return to the place I always longed to leave. The place where I grew up with lakes and pine trees and pastures. Open areas of non-populated land. Fresh air and clean water.*

Hanvey suggests in his third dimension that we develop "cross-cultural awareness....of the diversity of ideas and practices to be found in human societies around the world" (Hanvey, 1975, p. 8). Cross-cultural awareness initially asks participants to respect "local ways and viewpoints" and then to move along a continuum to achieve "depth of understanding....of the host society" (Hanvey, 1975, p. 10).

> *One thing I love about this culture is how people greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. It's a real warm way of saying that you'd like to be friends with some-one and that you appreciate their presence....*

Certain conventions of cultural behavior are more easily accepted than others.

> *The very first thing that I acted outrightly adverse to was the way men look at me and talk to me on the street when the say "guera"....I feel like they judge me before they know me.*

Depth of understanding of the host society appears to occasionally triumph even in the most mundane situations.

We were getting, I thought, too aggressive about what was being said to us on the street....and I don't know how or what made me decide that, but....after that I kinda had a good time with it....Gosh, you know, these guys live for this. They spend every day on the street corner harassing women but they don't consider it harassment.

Knowledge of global dynamics, the fourth dimension, requires "some modest comprehension of the key traits and mechanisms of the world system, with emphasis on theories and concepts that may increase intelligent consciousness of global change" (Hanvey, 1975, p. 13). Professors at home and at host universities introduce theory. There is evidence that certain participants are able to incorporate intelligent change practices during the internship. The final evaluation submitted by an international analyst who supervises students at a brokerage firm indicates modest beginnings.

The student showed a growing interest....in the inter-relationship of the Mexican market to other international markets demonstrating the ability to relate the global impact of the fluctuations in each market....He provided the research necessary concerning Japanese market techniques to enable us to incorporate them into the analysis procedure that we presently use in Mexico.

The final dimension emphasizes heightened "awareness of the problems of choice confronting individuals, nations, and the human species as consciousness and knowledge of the global system expand (Hanvey, 1975, p. 22). The very nature of international curricula create an opportunity to process knowledge from distinct perspectives.

Before this I was very focused on the growth of Europe and all the changes that have been happening and now I have been focusing on this part of the world and how business in Mexico is growing and the economy is growing....It's very complicated and very problematic right now with the state of the economy in the United States....What the United States wants is different than what Mexico wants from this agreement....There's a lot of things that the United States can gain from Mexico....I just have a different view of things now....How do you explain something like that?

Conclusions

The questions *What do students do?* and *How do they do it?* are primarily concerned with issues of human choice and meaning. To do interpretive research is "to subject to

critical scrutiny every assumption about meaning in any setting, including assumptions about desirable aims and definitions of effectiveness...." (Erickson, 1986, p. 122). The Advisory Council on International Educational Exchange has suggested fundamental changes in higher education which address the aims of international education. Major quantitative research projects have defined the effectiveness of international programs in terms of academic goals, vocational skills, and psychometric assessment of behavioral change. The reconceptualists lead by Freire envision an emancipatory paradigm that seeks to improve individuals and society through praxis. Robert Hanvey defines the attainment of a global perspective through the implementation of a pedagogical process that focuses on incremental levels of empathy and awareness. An interpretive methodology allows the researcher to deliberate inside the scene of the action and to search for salient meanings in idiographic participant reactions to the unexpected. These meanings have surfaced in the secret lives of undergraduate international business students and their perceptions of cross-cultural experience in multinational corporations abroad. The material of formal instruction for many of these participants is no longer isolated from the subject matter of life experience.

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